New Librarians: New Roles and New Services

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Thank you for the opportunity to join you today and talk about how the work of librarians and library workers in general is changing.

During the past 40 years while working in libraries, I have seen many changes. During the first half of my career when I worked more directly in delivering library services, I experienced many of these changes personally and had to adapt to changes through both on the job training as well as formalized continuing education. These changes included how information was packaged and how we helped our library patrons gain access to that information.

I will be speaking today primarily from my perspective of 40 years as a librarian in a public library setting. Throughout that time, I worked closely with librarians and others from libraries of all types. Particularly as a result of my tenure in the top elected position of the 60,000-member American Library Association, I had an opportunity to visit many libraries and talk with library leaders not just during my extensive travel in the United States but also in countries around the world including Brazil, New Zealand, China, Canada, Mexico, Sweden, Finland, and now Korea. I also have come to know many library leaders through the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA).

We are living in quite extraordinary times. Throughout many parts of the library world, reductions in our financial resources threaten our survival. At the same time, many libraries are experiencing large increases in demand and use. In all types of libraries, these challenges call for innovative thinking and forward-looking solutions. Our libraries must change and do so much more rapidly than in the past, especially if we want to not just survive but thrive.

In considering the topic of this presentation, I have organized my thoughts using a four focus areas presented in a policy brief from ALA's Office for Information Technology Policy: *Confronting the Future: Strategic Visions for the 21st Century Public Library*[1]. In this document, Roger Levien proposes four dimensions for library decision-making. While the policy brief is focused on public libraries, Levien suggests, and I agree, that these are useful constructs for other types of libraries as well. The four dimensions should each be viewed as a continuum. My talk today will focus on how these areas of change and the decisions we make in relation to them will have an impact not only on future roles and services but also on the staff expertise we need in our libraries to lead and manage them.

These four dimensions are as follows:

- the physical versus virtual library;
- the individual user versus the community of users of a library;
- the collection versus creative library; and
- the portal versus archival library.

Let us examine each of these in some detail.

The first dimension focuses on spaces and places, both physical and virtual. In the United States as well as many countries around the world, local, regional and national leaders are investing in building great new library destinations spaces, places where people are drawn often because of the grandness of the design as well as for the services offered in these spaces. I have seen many of these in large urban environments as well as small towns. Universities are redesigning their spaces to meet more of the needs of academic communities that recognize how students and faculty work in collaborative spaces. Public libraries are creating performance spaces that serve broader purposes for the

communities they serve. Indeed, these libraries design inviting spaces for children and their families, for teenagers who often help design the space and choose the furnishing in order to make them their own, and for older adults who are eager to engage in activities that go beyond their expectations of what a library might routinely offer. Indeed, people who reside in communities are discovering services from libraries that stretch their imaginations far beyond expectations.

One key point about these new dynamic library spaces is that they are often developed and services provided that benefit from library leaders collaborating with other parts of the community. Gone are the days when libraries developed services that were solely dependent on the individual library's resources. Now we look at how we can create an early childhood discovery center, working with early childhood development and education specialists and local organizations engaged with young children. These places still retain essential library features and services, with heavy emphasis on language development and contributing to each child being ready to read when it is time to enter formal education. But the community partners enrich the concepts and bring new perspectives to how we envision and develop these spaces and services.

On the other end of this first continuum is the virtual library, the presence and resources that we create in virtual space. Libraries were early to embrace technology and the Internet. We recognized not only that there were resources that would support our work in providing information but also that we had a significant role to play in helping people become technology users and develop their information literacy skills. As the technology for this virtual space develops much more rapidly than we can imagine, we are in a constant state of trying to keep up and catch up with our patrons.

Investment in the virtual space also allows us to expand many of our services far beyond the walls of our buildings, bringing vital resources right into homes, offices, and classrooms. Library leaders have to decide how to allocate those resources for maximum impact. Very few of us have the funding we need to do everything we would like to do. The result is that we have to make choices, and some of those choices, when the technology is short-lived, may be costly. An example we witnessed in the United States is when the Blu-ray technology began, some libraries jumped right in and started acquiring Blu-ray DVD's, only to find that many of their patrons skipped right over Blu-ray in favor of streaming. It is a little like the decision we needed to make a few decades ago when Beta and VHS formats were competing for the videotape market. Some bet on Beta to win the competition. Personally, I was one of them and as a result had made what turned out to be the wrong decision. When that happens to libraries, the resulting expenditures can be significant and sometimes of little or no value going forward.

Before we leave this dimension, let us consider some of the related skills and training that librarians and library workers need. Certainly creating and designing new spaces requires collaboration and working with design professional as well as with the communities of users we are trying to serve. Our investments in the virtual library require plenty of training and opportunities for learning and experimentation by our staff as well as hiring experts in information technology. Since the virtual library is such an important part of our library service now, we must make sure that we have people who can cross over from the more traditional library background to the highly technical world we are in. In other words, high levels of communication skills are required for success. Developing staff at all levels to work in teams is essential for moving forward as well. Rarely is this work the work of only one person. Another skill that has become more important is our ability to train and teach others. Decades ago, we would do much of the searching and finding for library users, training them along the way in using library resources. Now, we know that most people do a lot of searching on their own, forcing us to recognize that our work must contribute to greater independent information literacy. We must be good at teaching people how to search, how to evaluate the information they find, and how to use the information in responsible and ethical ways. When we controlled our collections of information, there were assumptions our users could make if they "found it in a library". With the Internet, as you know, those assumptions are not valid. It is much more critical that we be able to train people to use those skills if we want to have informed societies, which are essential for our democracies.

Levien's second dimension focuses on the user, with one end of the continuum being the individual user and the other being a community of users. It helps to think of this concept in different types of libraries. In an academic library, we can distinguish among all of the different library users. Some are highly trained in using libraries; some are not. Some are in their first year in the university, while others may be graduate students or highly specialized faculty. At the other end of the continuum is the concept of a community of users, which could be the full community served or subparts of that community. Again, looking at a university setting, the subgroups might be graduate students, or graduate students in a particular subject field, or graduate students from a particular country or ethnic group. Breaking communities down into these subparts is also easily imagined in public libraries. Examples might be groupings by age,

racial and ethnic populations, certain levels of educational achievement, the business community; these are just some examples.

When we develop our services in libraries, the service may serve an individual user but actually target a larger population. For example, many libraries in the United States offer homework help for children in school, both in the library as well as from a link on the library's website. That service actually serves an individual library user, who links to the homework help website. Obviously, when the library paid for having that service available through the library, the intended audience is school children in different grades, in different locations in the community, with different levels of educational achievement.

One of the very important focus areas for library service in the United States is serving diverse populations. In communities where I have worked, we have had multiple racial and ethnic populations that require services developed in some special way to serve them. An easy example to understand is different language populations. Most urban public libraries in the United States serve significant populations of people whose native language is not English. In communities where I have led libraries, languages have included Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Russian, and many others. This factor has made it essential that we manage our libraries and resources to reach out to these populations. For example, our websites will be available in multiple languages. We will have collections of materials and other resources in multiple languages. We will have employees who speak other languages in order to make people comfortable in using our services. We will invest significant training money in helping our staff understand and be sensitive to cultural differences. We have learned in the past few decades, especially as the population of the United States has become more diverse, that in order to create a welcoming environment, we must have a better understanding of how people from other countries and cultures think and behave. This kind of training is never ending, but when we invest in it, we see what a difference it can make.

Let me give you an example. I was the director of a public library system in Portland, Oregon, a community that has a less diverse population than many of the larger cities in the United States. After the fall of the Soviet Union over two decades ago, many people who lived in Russian-speaking countries immigrated to the United States, and some of them settled in Oregon. We did some very systematic work in those communities so that we could better understand how our libraries might improve services to our Russian-speaking populations. We quickly learned that while these immigrants spoke Russian, they were not Russian. Rather they were from some Eastern European countries such as Estonia, Romania, and other places. While they may have learned to speak Russian under the Soviet Union, they had strong identification with their own country and culture. Part of what we recognized we could do to serve them better was to invite people from the community to help us understand more about their background and culture. In doing so, we could serve them better.

Recognizing these different parts of our total community also helped us see opportunities to build bridges across communities. Many residents were interested in becoming US citizens so we formed a partnership with organizations that offered citizenship training. Many people were trying to learn to speak English so we worked with local organizations to offer programs to help people practice conversational English and also invited a local community college to offer classes in English through our libraries. These were all natural extensions of our library services. Since the United States was founded as a country of immigrants, our libraries have recognized the value of helping new Americans assimilate into the communities where they now live.

Another example of reaching individuals as well as larger subgroups of our populations is the way libraries have embraced mobile technology. One of the principal drivers for our use of mobile applications and social networking is that we understand that if we want to reach certain parts of our population, we can best do that through social networking. We have all witnessed the profound impact that social networking has had during major uprising such as in several countries in the Middle East. But we also know that most of those born during the 1980's and after rely almost entirely on mobile devices and are heavy users social networking. If we want to connect with them and expect them to be library users, then we have to engage them in the ways they live their lives. This is not dissimilar to our focus on improving communication and services for different ethnic populations. In both cases, we must not assume that the way we have always done things will suffice.

In academic communities as well as larger public library service areas, we have seen more examples of people actually moving the librarian out of the library and into the community. The term that has been used to describe this in the United States is the librarian is "embedded" in the community. For example, a librarian works in city hall, even though she/he is part of the public library staff. Or a librarian employed by a university is embedded in the bio-medical research building in order to interact more regularly and directly with the scientists being served.

Under the broad topic of community engagement, we in libraries have learned some important lessons in the past couple of decades. Funding of libraries in the United States is very often dependent on the way those libraries are viewed by their parent organizations. For a public library, the parent organization is usually a local government. For an academic or research library, the parent organization is a university or research community. In order for libraries to thrive, they must be engaged with their communities, understand their priorities, and connect the work that the library does in supporting their communities. This work means that librarians must get out into the community—and into sub-communities—to listen and understand the aspirations and priorities of those communities. The American Library Association believes this work is so important that we have launched a major initiative to train librarians in the United States in new ways to engage with their communities. We have received a grant form the US Institute for Museum and Library Services to work with Richard Harwood of the Harwood Institute, who has spent 20 years figuring out how to engage effectively in communities. One of his key concepts is the idea that we must "turn outward". Organizations generally tend to turn inward, to react to changes around them by looking inward at their own organizations. We think this reflects well the way we in libraries have operated in the past. We have tended to look at how do we change or add services, rather than going out and listening to the community we are serving. We tend to say, "We have a new service; let us tell you about it and how it will help you." The Harwood approach shifts the driver of our services outward rather than inward. A great example of this approach can be found in the Youngstown (Ohio) Public Library. Youngstown is a city that has been struggling in the past several decades with high unemployment and the loss of much of the middle class in that city. The leader of the public library there became convinced that if he employed the concepts of turning outward and listening to community aspirations, the Youngstown Public Library could become a central and essential service in helping to revitalize the community. This story has an incredible ending. In a time when unemployment was high and people were struggling to have the financial resources they needed, the community actually voted to increase their taxes to support the public library. The library had done such a good job of turning outward and supporting community aspirations that its voters decided that the library was essential to their future.

From this continuum – serving the individual versus serving a community – let us consider what additional skills, training, and expertise our librarians and staff need. Clearly, training to be more competent in serving different subgroups within the community has become a very important area. We also know that even if we are not ourselves heavy users of social networking and mobile apps, we must make sure that we have people on our staff who can be effective in their use on behalf of the library. We also need to develop strong communication skills, whether that means having staff that speak multiple languages or are comfortable working in the community when we take our library to them rather than expect them to come to us. The librarian embedded in the heart of a city government needs to understand the workings of that government, needs to understand the relationships among the people who work in city government, and must be able to communicate in a nonpartisan way with people across the political spectrum. And finally, we must become good listeners. We must be not only willing but also eager to understand the aspirations of the people we serve.

The third continuum is the collection library versus the creation library. For most of our existence, libraries have been very focused on collections – books, journals, audio-visual materials, and so on. We also know that the collection is much more than what we house in our libraries. We have so many resources that are available through the web. We still are focused in many ways on our physical and virtual collections, but we have also ventured into areas to help the creators of knowledge. We have always supported researchers and writers in our libraries. What is different now is that we are also supporting additional steps beyond libraries as centers for research. We refer to these new services as "maker spaces". Now some libraries are providing the equipment and services needed for publishing or for creating other media. Libraries have recognized that this is an important way that they can support the creators in their communities. In the Sacramento (California) Public Library, the I Street Press offers a community writing and publishing center. In the Chicago (Illinois) Public Library, the new "Maker Lab" opened in 2013 to offer an innovation space for creators, part of the growing movement of hands-on, collaborative learning environments in which people come together to share knowledge and resources to design, create and build items. Some libraries have begun offering resources for a community, which are too expensive for most organizations, such as a Digital Commons with a 3-dimensional printer and other technology, made available in the Washington, DC Public Library.

There are great examples of these kinds of creative spaces in other countries. I have seen "maker spaces" in the National Library in Copenhagen, Denmark. Perhaps you too have examples here in the Republic of Korea. We all can learn from each other in how these ventures work and how we might adapt them to our own library environments.

In working with collections as well as creating knowledge, we have skills we have had from our professional training that continue to be relevant such as collection building and maintenance, which we have learned how to apply

within the digital world. In developing and supporting "maker spaces", we have to learn new skills and make new connections. If we are going to offer publishing services, should we be making connections with editors and people who do marketing of products? Are there partnerships with individuals, organizations, and businesses, which we might make in order to facilitate the variety of steps involved in not just publishing but also providing access to newly created knowledge?

The fourth and final continuum is the library as portal versus the archival library. We are experiencing major shifts in how we provide information and resources to our communities. We used to own just about everything, and when we did not, we would borrow resources through interlibrary loan. Now, much of what we offer is access to resources that are located far from where we are. We license and lease many of our resources. We put our future in the hands of organizations and companies that may have very different missions from our own. We are concerned about whether we will have perpetual access to resources that we used to own. We wonder what may happen as technology changes; will we still have access to information in the future? Will we be able to afford to purchase future access?

Many libraries and library leaders are very concerned by these questions. As a profession, we feel a responsibility to preserve the world's knowledge for future generations. That is part of the reason that we keep archival collections, especially those that are unique such as local history resources.

We also see efforts to preserve the record of human knowledge through many libraries leading the way within their own countries or regions to not only make sure that we have digital access but also push that access to a wider audience. The effort in the United States to launch the Digital Public Library of America follows the lead of European countries in the launch of Europeana.

Expertise that we either need to bring into our libraries or hire an outside entity to provide includes the digitizing of materials, in some cases materials that are rare or unique. We also need to be able to understand what our libraries are uniquely positioned to contribute to our global world knowledge. We also need the expertise to provide access to our archival materials, leveraging the technology that makes our resources more widely available.

In closing, I would like to mention a few more issues for our consideration of changing roles and services. Libraries now more than ever before need to demonstrate their value to the communities they serve. We used to be able to count on support because funders just believed in the importance of libraries. But we have seen that point of view change and, in many cases, just disappear. Libraries need to demonstrate their value, and they have to do so in a way that not just librarians but more importantly library users can articulate to decision-makers and funders. Strong and sustained advocacy by the people we serve is what makes elected officials pay attention to libraries. We also have learned that the concepts of marketing our services helps us connect valuable services with the parts of our communities that can benefit from them. Marketing used to be just for the business world; now libraries are learning how to apply these concepts as well.

We also need to recognize that libraries need leaders at all levels. In the American Library Association and also in many libraries, there is strong investment in developing leaders for today and tomorrow. The American Library Association has an Emerging Leaders program as well as significant investment in developing leaders from diverse racial and ethnic groups. We are acutely aware that many of our most well-known leaders are aging, and we want to have talented leaders in our libraries for the challenges ahead. Just as important, we want our leaders to encourage leadership development at all levels, not just at the top of the organization. Leadership skills are valued for employees at all levels throughout the organization.

Lastly, our work must continually consider the changing demographics of the communities we serve. Perhaps the foremost leader in focusing on demographics is the Queens Library in New York City. The Borough of Queens has an unusually high population of people who have immigrated to the United States in the past 10 years. Queens has books and other materials in 25 different languages and its website is available in 7 different languages. The library director at Queens told me several years ago that they actually had a demographer, who worked on the staff. They continually reviewed the changes in populations and shifted collections of materials in other languages to branch libraries where they found different language communities living.

Thank you for your attention. There is no doubt that we work in a very challenging profession. We are being recognized more and more for the essential roles that we play in achieving community goals and priorities. We should never stop paying attention to our communities and think that we have achieved all that we can. Only by being willing

to change and evolve, to take risks to change our approach to fulfilling community needs, will we be able to not just survive but thrive in the future. There has never been a more exciting time to be a librarian!

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[1] Levien, Roger E. *Confronting the Future: Strategic Visions for the 21st Century Public Library*. Washington: American Library Association, Office for Information Technology Policy, 2011. Print and Web. http://www.ala.org/offices/oitp/publications/policybriefs